

Celebrator

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VICTORIA

Epicurean Gem of the Northwest

By Tom Dalldorf

Victoria is a delightful English-inspired city of historic structures (the Empress Hotel, the Parliament building) situated around an inner harbor bustling with ferries, harbor taxis and other maritime traffic. Floatplanes do their elegant aerial ballet to and from nearby Vancouver and Seattle, or fly simple sightseeing sorties.

And there is much to see around Victoria. Situated on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, a huge land mass straddling the latitude between Canada and the U.S., due west of both, Victoria is on the leeward side of the island. The weather for this year's 15th edition of the CAMRA-sponsored Great Canadian Beer Festival was nothing short of spectacular.

The GCBF began life 15 years ago and flourished in the confines of the Empress Hotel Conference Hall. The location was

The real sensation was Half Pints Brewing's Double IPA called ... wait for it ... Humulus Ludicrous. The hop-heads went wild!

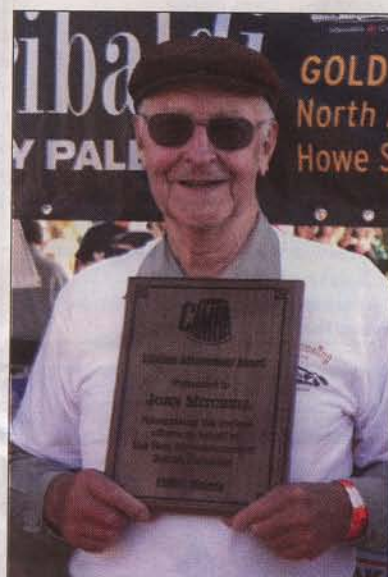
great for inclement weather but restricted both the number of breweries possible and number of people to enjoy them. A few years ago, the fest organizers moved the event to the more weather-friendly mid-September dates and to a spacious outdoor sports field called the Royal Athletic Park, a half-hour walk from Old Town. Held for two days, the fest features a lineup of the best beers British Columbia has to offer (which is increasingly excellent), plus beer from other provincial locations throughout Canada and from some U.S. breweries as well. This year Alpine, Anacortes, Baron, Boundary Bay, Elysian, Heads Up, Lazy Boy, Peaks Brew Pub, Pike, Silver City, Skagit River, Water Street and Winthrop Brewing all made the trip over from the state of Washington to make the party truly international.

The tents for the brewers and seating for attendees were arranged on the field like a village, with various "streets" for those wandering between clusters of breweries. Lineups for the beers (queues) arrayed out from the booths and consequently didn't create the congestion often encountered at other festivals. Some of the longest lines formed in the late afternoon around the "must-taste" offerings, including Merridale Ciderworks Scrumpy and products from several other worthy brewers. Quebec's Unibroue was very busy, as were the hotties at Hugo's Brewhouse doing their best Reno 911 impression.

For most, it was about the beer. Founding copublisher of the *Celebrator*, Bret Nickels, long decried the absence of good beer in his hometown of Winnipeg, Manitoba. A new brewery has changed all that, and Bret is elated! Half Pints Brewing brought its Little Scrapper IPA and Stir Stick Stout, but the real sensation was its Double IPA (!) called ... wait for it ... Humulus Ludicrous. The hop-heads went wild! And from Manitoba? Yeow!

Many of the breweries present, like Spinnakers from Victoria and Elysian from Seattle, brought cask beers and served them directly by gravity.

John Mitchell was honored by the CAMRA chapter for his pioneering work in opening the first brewpub in North America, Howe Sound, in 1982, and for promoting craft beer for the last 25 years.



Local brewpubs were packed for the weekend. We had beers at Swans Buckerfield Brewery and lunch at the waterfront at Canoe Brewpub. But the best beer and food were found at Spinnakers Gastro Brewpub, located on the inner harbor. Specializing in English-style beers and locally acquired, organic, sustainable meat, fish, poultry and produce, Spinnakers is a culinary gem. The owner is Vancouver Island's most notorious *terroir*-ist, Paul Hadfield, who showcased the bounty of the island with a special tasting dinner for his visiting guests. Local oysters and muscles, Muscovy duck, locally caught sablefish and superb produce were featured. Each course was presented with a house-brewed beer and a local wine.

When staying at Spinnakers, you can choose between spacious modern accommodations and a beautifully restored 19th-century Victorian house with period furnishings.

I hope to see you at the '16th annual event next year!

CBN

Tom Dalldorf is publisher and editor of the Celebrator Beer News.



Photos by Tom Dalldorf

Malt so good they named a town after it!

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